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Colby Says CIA Dilatory On Watergate

WILLIAMSBURG, Va., Oct. 15 (AP)—Director William E. Colby said today the Central Intelligence Agency could have gone to prosecutors with information about Watergate earlier than it did, but "we didn't fall all over ourselves rushing to the policemen."

Colby replied to an allegation by Seymour M. Hersh, the New York Times reporter who first wrote about illegal domestic spying by the CIA. Hersh said the CIA "could have blown the whistle at any time" about Watergate. "I think Sy is right," Colby said. "In fact, we didn't fall all over ourselves rushing to the policemen."

Hersh and Colby participated in a panel discussion at the Associated Press managing editors' 42d annual meeting.

Colby said the concern in the CIA around the time of the June 17, 1972, Watergate break-in was that the agency's tangential involvement might be sensationalized.

Hersh noted that two days after the break-in at Democratic National Committee headquarters, top CIA officials discussed the fact that months earlier then-White House aide John D. Ehrlichman had asked the CIA to give covert assistance to E. Howard Hunt Jr.

That assistance, in the form of a wig and other material, was used by Hunt in connection with the 1971 break-in

at the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist. (Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers, a study of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, to the press in 1971.) Hersh said that on June 19, 1972, CIA officials were aware that Hunt also was linked to the Watergate break-in.

Referring to the June 23, 1972, White House meeting at which CIA officials were ordered to tell the FBI to limit its investigation of the Watergate break-in, Hersh asked, "Why didn't they (CIA officials) walk over to the U.S. attorney's office?"

Hersh noted that it wasn't until October or November that the CIA went to the prosecutors.

While conceding that there are many aspects of CIA activity in the Watergate case "that we're not proud of," Colby appealed to the editors for what he called a responsible approach to examining the CIA.

Colby said current investigations "are basically bringing to light the things that the intelligence community found and corrected."

He said the CIA is receiving more applications this year than last from persons wanting to join the Agency and said the CIA still is able to recruit overseas.

Hersh said he respects Colby "as somebody who always has told me the truth," but he said, "I think what we need is a wipe-out at the top" of the CIA.

Colby noted that he serves at the pleasure of the President and would resign any time he felt he no longer could be effective.

"It may be a new face would make a new phase in the history of our intelligence activities," Colby said.